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## 16. DOING RE-ENTRY: ACCOUNTS OF POST-PRISON RELEASE IN FINLAND AND THE UNITED STATES

This chapter is about life after prison. The topic of re-entry is of relatively recent interest among academics, policy makers and correctional administrations both in the United States and the rest of the western world. This is due, in large part, to over-incarceration and the costs associated with maintaining these prison populations. With concern over tough economic conditions throughout the world, unacceptably high recidivism rates in some countries shifted attention beyond the prison walls to the challenges associated with transitioning from prison to the outside free world.

The focus of this chapter is to examine the accounts given by men and women released from prison in Finland and the United States. The research for this chapter is based on interviews and the participant observation of returning prisoners who have participated in various ex-offender support groups or organizations. The interviews explored a variety of dimensions of re-entry, including preparing for life after prison, meeting basic needs on the streets, and how ex-offenders were able to maintain crime free lifestyles after rather lengthy criminal histories. A short introduction to the literature on re-entry precedes

the findings, exploring the social contexts where re-entry occurs, and giving a description of the methods used in this research.

## Problems Associated with Re-entry

Experiencing prison carries numerous direct and indirect consequences. Sykes referred to this as the “deprivations of incarceration.” In previous papers (Richards and Jones, 1997; 2003), we identified a variety of structural impediments to post-prison success in the United State, which ultimately leads to a perpetual incarceration machine, which is essentially the recycling of prisoners in and out of prison. Four structural problems associated with re-entry are employment concerns, housing concerns, family troubles and various legal restrictions. In addition, ex-offenders must also cope with various psychological and emotional issues, including drug and alcohol problems, anger and frustration over their incarceration as well as having to face the structural problems associated with re-entry.

In Clemmer’s study of Menard (1940), he stated that all prison inmates will become socialized, to a greater or lesser degree, into the prison community, which harbors attitudes that are in opposition to the free world. The longer an inmate is incarcerated, the greater the likelihood of his full immersion into the prison way of doing things. As a result, length of incarceration is one key factor in re-entry success. In addition, many prisoners have histories of inadequate education and poor work histories. So, available programming in prison can also play an important role in addressing inmate disadvantage, and improving one’s chance of successful re-entry, as well as reducing an inmate’s identification with the prison social world.

## Social and Cultural Context

Finland and the United States found itself in very similar places in 1960 (Tonry, 2001; Lappi-Sepala, 2001). Both countries have had similar attitudes toward crime and punishment, with an emphasis on the use of imprisonment to satisfy one's debt to society for the commission of crime, and for purposes of deterrence. In addition, their respective crime rates are also very similar. The 1960s brought about efforts at social reform in both countries, especially with reference to criminal justice. However, within a decade, Finland and the United States went into two different and opposing trajectories.

For the United States, there was a liberal shift in criminal justice that brought about the indeterminate sentence with the primary purpose of corrections being the rehabilitation of offenders. This was a time of the creation and implementation of a variety of treatment-related programs that were designed to address the problems facing prisoners. Once these problems were addressed, inmates should be able to transition more easily out of prison into the free world. In addition, many states began reducing prison populations by closing some of their prisons and vowing to incarcerate only the most serious offenders. By the early 1970s, recidivism rates were not being reduced, and there was growing support for more conservative, or punitive, forms of punishment. It was deemed that "nothing works" (Martinson, 1974) in terms of treatment programs, which then provided the basis for abandoning treatment and shifting to determinate sentencing with an emphasis on mass incarceration, long prison sentences, severe deprivations associated with incarceration, and a lack of meaningful treatment programs available to those prisoners who needed and desired such programming. From the 1970s to the present, the United States has witnessed skyrocketing rates of imprisonment, reaching today's current prison population of over 2.1 million prisoners.

In reference to re-entry, roughly 700,000 prisoners are released into their communities every year (Petersilia, 2003). Inmates leaving American prisons face a very bleak situation upon their release.

Long prison sentences are likely to have strained family ties, thereby threatening one possible resource for re-entry. In addition, the stigma associated with a criminal record will make it extremely more difficult to find employment sufficient to support a family. Also, affordable housing is hard to find, and ex-prisoners with drug convictions are denied housing that is supported with federal monies. Finally, the expense associated with prison construction and mass incarceration has left little revenue to operate residential treatment programs to assist with ex-offender re-entry. This helps us to understand why recidivism rates in the United States remain high at roughly 67% failure.

In Finland, however, since they made the decision to turn away from correctional policies heavily influenced by the former Soviet Union, we have witnessed a tremendous shift in philosophy which Ekunwe (2005) refers to as “Gentle Justice.” Embodied in this philosophy is a concern for the citizen (including criminals and prisoners), thereby maintaining many of the rights of citizenship for Finnish prisoners, while also insuring a range of rehabilitative programming and re-entry services. Criminals in Finland are sent to prison as punishment for their crimes, rather than being sent to prison to be punished further. As a result, every effort is made to reduce the negative impacts of incarceration as much as possible. This is accomplished by relying on relatively short prison sentences, and strong efforts to help prisoners maintain contact with family through family visits (conjugal) at the prison, or furloughs that allow prisoners to visit their families in their own home. One other development in Finland was the creation of the open prison. It is in this facility that prisoners are allowed to study or work in the community, and return to prison later in the day. In his keynote address at the Global Re-entry conference (2010) in Tampere, Finland, Jarmo Littunen from the Ministry of Justice noted that the prison population has been going down steadily in the past 5 years, reducing the population by nearly 15%. Approximately 4,000 prisoners are released annually. In addition, recidivism rates hover around 31%.

A prisoner leaving prison in Finland will have a variety of resources available to him or her. All citizens including released prisoners are entitled to social benefits, which include housing allowance as well as unemployment insurance. As noted previously, these are severe hardships that are faced by American prisoners upon their release. In addition, the stigma associated with a criminal conviction will not be used to prevent employment in Finland, unless the crime was of a nature that was incompatible with the demands of the workplace (for example, sex offenders would be restricted from working with children). Finally, there is a variety of private groups that are available to ex-offenders to assist them with re-entry, including providing assistance in finding employment and battling drug and alcohol problems. All of the Finnish participants in this paper were members of one such group, CRIS (Criminals Returning into Society).

As can be readily seen, corrections in Finland and the United States have headed in different directions for the last forty years. While budgetary concerns are forcing US policy makers to re-think the incarceration binge, refocusing their attention on the problems associated with re-entry has been slow to pass. Finland, on the other hand, is extremely happy with the direction they have taken, and continue on the path to even further reform. Future goals include developing more open prisons, with the hope of shifting more of their prisoners to this venue (up to 35%).

## Data and Methods

The data for this paper comes from numerous sources. In 2002, Jones began a participant observation study of a local Prison Fellowship Ministries (PFM) aftercare program. For over 3 years, Jones participated in a variety of activities sponsored by PFM, including regular prison visitations, mentor training, and weekly aftercare meetings

with ex-convicts and family members. The local PFM was headed by a formerly incarcerated minister, who claimed on many occasions to have developed an army of ex-offenders who had taken Jesus into their hearts. The primary purpose of the aftercare meetings was support and fellowship, for both ex-offenders and family members. There was a core group of a dozen ex-cons who regularly attended, and a much larger number who dropped in and out in the course of three years. Field notes were collected, and interviews were conducted with all of the regulars.

In 2004, a second data source was identified and contacted. The program was called Project Return, a private, non-profit organization that grew out of the concerns of a local church which was concerned about the challenges facing ex-offenders. While Project Return engages in a variety of activities, their primary concern is job readiness and assistance with employment searches. With the assistance of the executive director, Jones was allowed to observe at the offices of Project Return, and a list of successful ex-offenders was provided for follow-up interviews. Twenty-five interviews were completed in both organizations with the focus on the problems associated with re-entry and the ex-offenders' efforts to remain crime free.

In 2007, Ekunwe began an observational study of CRIS, Tampere. CRIS began as a fellowship association in Sweden by eleven re-offending inmates serving repeat prison sentences in 1997. These eleven members developed a model for re-entry that included having friends (who had already been released from prison) come and meet them at the prison gate to assist them in their re-entry. One important feature of CRIS is complete abstinence from drugs and alcohol. Secondly, it was believed that assistance from ex-cons who had already experienced re-entry would serve as positive role models for more recently released ex-offenders. At the beginning, these eleven members served as a support group for each other. However, within 1 year, they decided that they should expand this model to provide direct service for a larger population of ex-offenders. To further their work, they opened a substance-free day center for members.

In 2001, a Finnish prisoner in Sweden was released from prison, and she brought the idea of CRIS to Finland. A meeting was held with about a half dozen former prisoners who had managed to sober up, and CRIS Finland was born out of this meeting. By 2005–06, many new CRIS associations were founded throughout Finland, with CRIS Tampere being one of them. With a membership of over 100 members, it is one of the strongest associations in existence. Ekunwe was provided access to CRIS offices, and attended numerous activities and social events. In addition, 25 interviews have been conducted with members.

Interviews from these various data sites were recorded in the native tongue of the respondents, and later translated into English. Data were analyzed using the techniques of the “constant comparative method’ formulated by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The purpose of this analysis is the search for common themes that arise from the data, to help provide a holistic view of the experiences related by ex-prisoners regarding their re-entry experiences. The remainder of this paper analyzes themes that have emerged from the data, and provides meaningful comparisons between the experiences of Finns and Americans. The chapter will conclude with considerations for policy recommendations and the literature on re-entry.

## Looking Outside From Prison

In *Doing Time* (2001), Jones and Schmid present a 5 stage prison career model.<sup>1</sup> Of particular concern for this paper is how prison inmates both complete their prison sentence as well as anticipate their return

1. *Doing Time* describes life in a maximum security prison, as experienced by first-time prisoners. It is an examination of how participants in the prison world arrive at a fuller understanding of this world through direct experience. The five stages are anticipation of the prison social world, orientation to the prison social world, accommodation to prison, concluding the prison career, and anticipation of the outside world.



to the free world. As noted by Jones and Schmid, re-entry begins prior to one's release from prison. Re-entry begins once inmates imagine their life in the outside world, and begins making preparations for their eventual return to that free world.

For the US prisoners, their approach to preparing for the outside world began once they made the decision that this would be the last time that they went to prison. For some, they just grew tired of bouncing between prison and the streets. Whether they were maturing with age, or had grown wearing from "ripping and running," these inmates had made a conscious decision to alter their criminal lifestyles and to go straight. Generally, there were two approaches taken by members of the respondent group.

You are talking about bottoming out, where you have to be at a point where you recognize that you are in the wrong direction, and number two, that you want to change direction....Out of all these incarcerations, going in and out of prison, there was no mind change, you know, I didn't have it made up in my mind that I wanted to do something different so I'm just in here, mind still stagnated on when I was out and I get out again after probably after 2 ½ years and I violate again. You know, I am looking at the um, there was really no, you know, some guys commit crimes for a reward and I'm saying there is no reward in that. But I'm going on being heavily intoxicated and with the urge of wanting to use crime. That's what propelled me to do this. And, when I got that reaction I said, I am wasting my life and it took up to this point, you know, I guess everyone's life, a certain time you say, I am tired of this, and that's why, that's when I broke through.

The first strategy employed was to address some of the limitations that the prisoners had by taking classes and programs that addressed educational issues, vocational training, and attending any positive programming that aimed to utilize their time productively, and where they could demonstrate to employers in the free world that they had changed from their previous criminal ways.

The second strategy employed primarily by members of prison fellowship ministries was to put their lives in God's hands. This approach entailed surrounding themselves with other believers, and to engage in serious study of the Bible. Specifically, they developed a support group within the prison that helped remove them from many of the negative influences of prison life. Many who chose this strategy had been convicted of very serious crimes that caused much embarrassment and shame to the inmate and family members (sex offenses, murder). As one respondent put it:

You know, I was tired. I had been tired and I just didn't know how to get out. I felt trapped and I just didn't know how to get out. I had been tired. I knew that this was not something that I wanted to do. I just didn't know how to stop doing what I was doing, and when that desire...I know the Lord gave me the desire to want to live right and it just took away the fight, you know, and that's when I was able to surrender.

Another respondent expressed how important other people's support is in the process:

Well, I think it's my faith, my belief in myself and the various support systems that are out there that we need to seek them out—you need to say that you need help. You need to recognize that you can't do it by yourself and just accept the fact that you need somebody to hold your hand or somebody to just walk with you. Maybe the walk is short, maybe the walk is long, just walk with me for a while, just be my friend and point me in the right direction if I seem like I am getting off of the right path, just someone to point me in the right direction.

For Finland, most of our sample had grown tired of the criminal lifestyle and the problems associated with long term use of alcohol and drugs, as one of the ex-convicts interviewed puts it “...*Of course*

*everyone here in CRIS has their personal experiences but the connecting factor is the intoxicants which helps us understand the experience and being substance-free is the main thing here at CRIS, and I like to think it is also the last thing. It all starts and ends with that*". They acknowledged the pain caused to family members over their criminal careers and were now ready to make a change. Knowing how difficult this task would be, many looked to CRIS to provide support in their efforts to change; this is reflected in the testimonies of some respondents:

No don't think it did. I went straight to treatment and there actually...  
.(pause) I mean before I hadn't really been honest, I mean about taking drugs, but there I told them that I was smoking pot in prison that I might have a positive piss sample and that. So after the last sentence I went straight to the treatment centre from the prison gates. I mean KRIS came to pick me up from there and took me.

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With KRIS, I have built this support network around me... Although they have committed crimes before, they don't anymore. They keep me out of trouble these days, they are ex-substance abusers, ex-criminals ex-cons most of them. Yeah that group of people are um, like my support. One huge thing is this KRIS, where I also now working, is that it keeps me clean.

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I didn't have any expectations, I was either going to come to KRIS or go to the dockyard to do spray painting, those were quite clear. Valkama (KRIS worker) came to see me in prison and told me that some just come to KRIS to get acquainted with the place for some time and then they say this isn't for me and that... it kind of grew on me the whole thing.

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Well, it gave me company, um, that accepted me the way I am and, um, I mean, in the NA I felt I couldn't really talk about the crimes and the stuff related to that, and um, they weighed heavy on me; I mean my sentences and other stuff. At KRIS I feel I can open up about that slowly.

For inmates from Finland and the US, concern for family members (wife, lover, and/or children) served as motivation to change. This is an important element in transforming ones' identity from being a criminal to a law-abiding member of society. Maruna (2001) has been critical of the concept of recidivism for both measurement problems as well as definitional issues. Maruna notes that a large percentage of recidivists are returned to prison for technical violations rather than for committing new criminal offenses. In addition, various jurisdictions had different definitions for recidivism, which makes comparisons across jurisdictions difficult.

## Walking Out the Gate

It is common for an inmate leaving prison to hear from others that they are expected to return to prison.

Just like when I got out of prison, it's funny because my parole officer looked at my file and I have never had a record before. This was my first crime ever. And when she first met me she was like, she read over my file and she was like, OK, I give you maybe a week or two and you will be back in prison. And that made me so mad.

With recidivism rates in the US at around 67%, that sentiment isn't that far-fetched. However, as an inmate readies himself to walk through the prison gates for the last time, his happiness over concluding his prison

sentence overrides any expectations of failure. Inmates leaving prison have been marking time throughout their sentences, crossing off each passing date until their release day arrives. Well aware of the failures of others, as well as their own problems with staying crime free in the community, many prisoners have done everything that they possibly could do to improve their odds of successful re-entry.

We have already identified many of the challenges facing ex-cons in American society. It is important to note what resources may be available to assist in the re-entry process. Most inmates in the United States leave prison with the clothes they are wearing (a prison uniform, a new set of clothes, or the clothes worn when they entered prison) and with gate money of between \$100 and \$200, depending on the state. Because wages for work completed in prison are usually low (less than 50 cents an hour), it is difficult for inmates to meet basic needs in prison, let alone save much to assist them in their re-entry.

Many inmates leave prison without a place to live, and most do not have enough money to rent an apartment on their own. As a result, many inmates live with family members immediately after their release from prison. These living arrangements are not always conducive to successful re-entry, with a myriad of criminogenic factors within the immediate neighborhood, and sometimes within the home as well.

Uh, one thing I knew when I was getting close to getting out, I knew that I couldn't go live with my mother because it was dysfunctional there and I said that I thought to myself, if I wanted to live there, it's only a matter of time before I would be back where I was, so I contacted my parole officer and said that I really need structured living so she put me in a transitional living home.

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I lived with him (uncle) for about 6 months and from there I had been staying with my sister, which wasn't very easy, especially when you aren't working, and they swinging the bills and this and that, you know, it's been pretty tough.

Many ex-cons rely on temporary or transitional housing, although the demand for these facilities is far greater than the supply. Others are able to use contacts that they have made through programs such as prison fellowship.

Someone heard I was in town. They said, hey, we heard you were in town. I got the number from friends that you called and said I got a place. It needs cleaning up. Now, if you don't have a place and you need a place, you can go and stay there. Right now, it's available and if you are willing to clean it up, you can stay there. And that's how I got it. Once housing is obtained, the next step is to find employment.

As previously mentioned, many ex-prisoners have little education and very poor or non-existent work histories. In addition, the stigma associated with a criminal record works as another obstacle to finding employment. In her article "The Mark of a Criminal, Pager (2003) found that there is only a slight chance for an African American male with a criminal record to find a job. However, the odds improve slightly for women of other ethnicities, as well as for white and Latino males. Parole officers may provide their charges with leads on jobs. However, most ex-cons scan the want ads and make use of various employment agencies, some of which specialize in ex-convicts. These organizations will help ex-cons prepare a resume, as well as provide advice on interviewing strategies.

Ex-cons are expected to search far and wide for employment, and some of their meager savings goes for transportation to and from job interviews.

When I first got out of prison I thought I was going to get out, get me a job and then just, save my money and try to deal from there. Own a house, own a car, you know, it's been pretty tough. My main goal was to get out and find me a job and you know, stay crime free cause I ain't trying to go back to prison. The main thing was to find me a job. But I can't seem to find that job.

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I am really learning the city, though, and the bus system. It takes almost everything I have to get to these job interviews, and it is such a long ride home when I know I won't get the ob.

Most ex-cons know almost immediately if they are going to get the job, even while the interview is still being conducted.

Well, you go in, sit down, introduce yourself, he looks over, had the application in front of you. He asks some questions. I have been locked up for 20 years, so he wants to know about the spotty work history and you tell him about, you know, I was incarcerated. OK, that explains the spotty work history and then, right after that, if they ask you what you was in for, when I tell them and when they put their heads down to the paper, and they look for a couple of minutes, right there I know, I know, man, this is just not going to happen.

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I mean, I'm still trying to do it now. It's hard. I'll have the job. I'll go into the interview. I have the job, and as soon as they hear the word felon, you can see the whole expression change. Not even to ask you what you were in for. It's not like I am a child molester or anything like that. The felony is something else. So, I am still searching for work.

Lack of stable housing and a phone number work hand and hand to disadvantage ex-offenders. Employers require an address and phone number from ex-offenders for potential call backs and background checks.

I know what I want to be, I just don't know how to get there. I have put applications in for all types of meaningless jobs and never got a call back from them. I mean, I just want to get into the field that I want to and to support my family. Right now I am not supporting

them—she is doing all of the supporting. And that is hard for me. But I don't want to go back to prison and I don't want to lose my family, so I keep looking for work.

In Finland, the situation is markedly different. All people leaving prison are entitled to housing subsidies and unemployment insurance. In addition, many inmates will have already made arrangements for housing prior to their release. An interview discussion with a respondent epitomized the search for an apartment before and after lease in Finland as follows:

**Question:** So that means that when you were about to get out of the prison, you were able to rent an apartment and you got housing allowance from the government, and then the social office paid a part of it while you paid a very little fraction of it?

**Answer:** Yeah, that's right.

**Question:** That is quite different from America.

**Answer:** Yes, in Finland everyone has this opportunity. Or should have, it just depends on whether you can actually find an apartment.

**Question:** Yeah... and when you came out of prison now, were you on parole?

**Answer:** Yes I was.

**Question:** So how was your relationship with your parole officer?

**Answer:** I was really prejudiced. I think I was on parole after the second, third and fourth and also the fifth sentence but I didn't go there that much. I just went when they told me that if you don't come now you'll be sent back to prison or that there was going to be some bad consequences if I didn't go. But the thing with the last



sentence was different as I had been working to improve myself in the detox department so that I would be able to make it, so I went there with an open mind that time. In fact, it was in Pori, it was a 40km trip for me to go and see the parole officer and they promised me they would reimburse me my costs so I went with my own car, my grandmother had bought me a car when I was released, and um, yeah s/he was a really cool person in the end and I realized straight away that s/he wanted to help me. So turns out it ended up being quite a good parole officer relationship, s/he didn't use me, just wanted to help me make it. S/he organized a sponsor for me from some sort of sponsor employment agency and all this sort of stuff so yeah s/he was really nice.

In addition, inmates in Finnish prisons are paid a living wage (roughly 5 euros an hour for work inside the prison). If inmates work outside the prison, their wages will be significantly higher, but they will also be expected to pay some of the costs of room and board.

Unemployment insurance, coupled with savings from prison, assist the inmate in his/her transition to the outside world, taking much of the pressure off the ex-con in putting a roof over his head. This is very important, since additional stress can lead to a relapse to drug and alcohol usage.

Access to education and vocational resources while incarcerated also improve the ex-cons chances of successful re-entry. Finnish ex-convicts, as opposed to Americans, are aware that re-entry success is possible if, upon their return to society, they make sufficient changes in their criminal lifestyles.

## It's about Family

One of the deprivations associated with incarceration is separation from family and friends, or the denial of heterosexual relationships (Sykes,

1958). To deal with this loss, inmates often develop close friendships inside prison, or become further entrenched in the prison social world. Letters and visits can lessen the impact of the emotional and social distance separating family members and the inmate.

In the United States, inmates are often incarcerated a significant distance from loved ones, making visits a difficult proposition for family members and friends.

My aunt came to visit me once, but other than that, I really didn't have anybody to come visit because my mother lived in another state and I thought that would be too much for her to try and bring my kids to visit. So, it was basically letter writing. I was always apprehensive about phone calls, simply because I never wanted the phone to be turned off because I made too many collect calls.

For some inmates, concern about the length of their sentences and the possibility that they might never get out of prison led some inmates to cut off contact with the outside world. That was one way that they could exercise some control over the situation.

You know, I really didn't have much contact because my family lived in Omaha, Nebraska and I'd write letters sometimes and it was a situation where I didn't really think that I was going to get out because I knew I had all this time and I knew that I was so angry and upset. So, I consciously made a decision to cut off all kind of contact with anybody that I might have had a relationship with before I went to prison.

In addition, strict visitation rules limit the number of hours available for inmates each month, as well as the nature of these visits. Conjugal visits occur in very few jurisdictions, and furloughs for short stays with family members have been severely reduced across the country.

Contact with children was a much more difficult proposition. Inmates would have to rely on the children's mothers to cooperate

with visitation, as well as other relatives to drive the children to the prison for the visit.

Most of the contact that I had with my daughter was by telephone and letters. Telephone was the basic form of contact. Letters were probably secondary. I think I saw her once during my incarceration, or at least sporadically. I would go 3 or 5 years between visits with her. Part of the problem was she was out of state.

It is also not unusual for inmates to lose parental rights to their children while incarcerated, which creates another stumbling block for successful re-entry. Female inmates are especially vulnerable to this, and may have to spend enormous resources (time and money) to regain custody of their children upon their release from prison. Divorce is also a common experience for inmates serving long prison sentences.

I decided, I told my wife—she was a very special person—but she had her life to live too. In order for me to do easy time, and to make it easy for her, I asked her would she get a divorce. She said yes and in fact I just saw my wife after all of these years a week ago.

One rationale for severing contact with the outside world, then, is to make their time in prison pass more easily. For some inmates, family members just can't handle seeing their loved ones in prison. As one respondent put it:

No, she said, look, you go out and get into trouble...I can't come visit you in these places. I just refuse to see my son. So, I understood that, and the same with my father.

One of the purposes of the penitentiary was to provide inmates with an opportunity for self-reflection. It is through this self-reflection that inmates may come to realize the many mistakes that have led them to this point in their lives. Maruna (2001) believes that prisoners

need to make sense of their lives, and to create a coherent, pro-social identity for themselves. To do this, inmates must understand their criminal pasts and then understand why they are no longer like that anymore. In essence, inmates need a whole new perspective on life. One motivation for prisoners to succeed in life after prison is to be a better husband and father.

The situation in Finland relating to family contact and support is quite different in comparison to the United States. In the United States, a prison sentence impacts tremendously on the entire family, not just because of the incarceration of the offender, but also because of the loss of a wage earner. Little thought is given towards the family of offenders in the United States. However, in Finland, every effort is made to help maintain family contact and support throughout incarceration. With relatively shorter prison sentences, contact with family through conjugal visits in the family cottage, or furloughs to the family home are encouraged. Counseling is also available to inmates and family members to assist with adjustment issues. Also, inmates do not have to worry as much about the family's financial situation. Children in Finland receive financial support from the government, and other subsidies for housing and employment are available to spouses.

It is through this context by which inmates may see the error of their ways in relation to their criminal lifestyles. A stay in prison may actually provide the impetus to strengthen family bonds, and may be used as a catalyst for transforming one's identity. While significant differences exist between the prison experience in Finland and the United States in regards to the family, the family can serve as a catalyst for change in the inmate, from a criminal lifestyle to that of a law-abiding citizen.

## Removing Temptation: Drugs and Alcohol

Without a doubt, alcohol and drug abuse is a problem for offenders in both Finland and the United States. Availability of drug and alcohol treatment programs in prison is a valuable resource in transforming the lives of inmates. The increasing prison populations in the United States has strained corrections budgets, thereby creating long waiting lists for inmates in search of rehabilitation programs. It is clear that bricks and mortar are taking a larger slice of the prison budget. In addition, a lack of resources has severely limited access to drug and alcohol treatment in the community for returning ex-convicts.

Because I can just go right here to July 4<sup>th</sup>. We're having a barbecue over at my mother's house and my sister is making strawberry daiquiris and my brother, he just got out of prison, and he will be drinking beer but he can handle it. But not me. I can't take a swallow of beer, you know, because I know I am off to the races. I will never put myself in a compromising situation where I know there is going to be drinking. So, even with my family, I have to be careful. So, I stop by and say hi to everyone, find out what's going on, and then it is time for me to go. My mother always asks me why every time I come over I am in such a hurry to leave. I have to.

The situation is quite different in Finland. Commitment to a drug and alcohol-free life by ex-convicts is met with access to the necessary resources to assist in their recovery. This is one of the most important characteristics of CRIS, which not only expects its members to be drug-free, but which provides a variety of support services to assist ex-offenders in their transition to the free world. Since CRIS members are all ex-convicts, recently released ex-offenders find a supportive environment to help them through the difficult adjustment to a life without drugs and alcohol, as paraphrased by one of the respondents:

**Question:** What do you think would happen if you were still abusing substances?

**Answer:** I had a relapse at one point and I have to say it took me back about 20 years right away. I went straight back to where I'd left off before. Maybe not with the same intensity as I'm older now and there are other factors which limited my drinking, but the attitude I had was exactly the same.

**Question:** What was your attitude like?

**Answer:** Well, the intoxicant worked in the same way; I started fighting and was charged with assault. Everyone was fined for fighting but it took me right back down the same track so there was absolutely no point in it whatsoever.

**Question:** OK. What do you do nowadays?

**Answer:** I try and stay sober and try to maintain this quality of life. I'm already old enough to know that human life is not such a long process after all.

**Question:** Mmm (in agreement).

**Answer:** I've also been doing voluntary work for KRIS for a few years now. I go to prisons to meet people who've mainly got substance abuse problems and often for that reason they also end up doing time. Those are probably the most important things I do, although there are many other things too but that gives me a lot now that I've retired.

From the other side of the ocean, the key to success is put nicely by one respondent from the United States.

You have to have structure, you have to have discipline. You have to have people who are going to keep you accountable. You have to have positive people in your life. You have to want to live responsibly; you want to live independently at the same time. You have to automatically have gainful employment, because that is kind of like a confidence builder, to be able to go to work every day and to earn your own keep because I have learned in the past when you are living with someone and you are not putting anything in the house, things start getting a bit tense.

## Summary and Conclusion

There are severe limitations to any cross cultural analyses, and that is true for the present paper. Direct comparisons between the prison and re-entry experiences of men and women in Finland and the United States is impractical for a number of reasons, including the differences in scope between the two countries as well as the methodological issues around sampling and generalizability of findings.

For the present paper, we were interested in exploring what factors might help explain successful re-entry in Finland and the United States. In order to do this, we conducted research in three settings that assisted ex-offenders in their transition from prison to the free world. Two of these organizations were formed by ex-convicts, with the aim of ex-offenders assisting ex-offenders with their re-entry (CRIS in Finland and Prison Fellowship Ministry in Milwaukee, Wisconsin). A third organization, Project Return in Milwaukee, is a private, non-profit organization that assists ex-offenders seeking employment. Ex-offenders are often referred to Project Return by parole officers.

Since we were interested in successful re-entry, we utilized snowball sampling procedures, with the intention of interviewing whoever made themselves available to us to be interviewed. What resulted from these

data collection efforts were accounts of ex-offenders transitions from prison to the free world. In terms of similarities, we discovered that doing time is doing time, regardless of the conditions of confinement. What this means is that loss of liberty is the most important aspect of incarceration. Any other punishment associated with incarceration is just unnecessary and may compound the problems associated with re-entry. However, each society approaches the issue differently, which has important impacts on the incarcerated, thereby reflecting how one does time and influencing the likelihood of successfully re-entering society.

Secondly, criminals are criminals, regardless of whether they are from Finland or the United States. Men and women sent to prison represent that society's marginalized population. For whatever reason, they adopt values that put them at odds with conventional society. As a result, they create comfort niches, or people that they identify with and support their lifestyle choices. Lack of educational achievement characterizes ex-offenders in both countries. In the United States, race and ethnicity add an additional element to marginalization.

In general, the path to successful re-entry follows a similar pattern from self-reflection, a desire to change, a search for resources to assist in this change, and the help of other ex-offenders in adopting a non-criminal identity. The primary motivations for this transformation is a concern for others (Maruna, 2001), as well as being tired of the criminal lifestyle and the associated incarceration. This general pattern held true for ex-offenders interviewed and observed in Finland and the United States.

However, there are significant differences between the two countries and the experiences of ex-offenders in each country. American ex-offenders have it much rougher than Finnish ex-offenders, which may help to explain why recidivism rates in Finland are so low in comparison to the United States. Ex-offenders in the United States face serious obstacles in finding employment and housing upon their release from prison. In addition, relatively long prison sentences make it very difficult to maintain strong family bonds during one's



incarceration. Very little effort is made by correctional authorities to strengthen an inmate's ties to the family and community.

Finland, on the other hand, has made an effort to make the prison experience as close to life in the free world as possible. Education and vocational training are readily available. Inmates who work make a decent wage, allowing them to save money for their eventual return to the outside world. In addition, conjugal visits and furloughs are available to prisoners to help maintain family bonds. Finally, numerous organizations, including CRIS, have emerged to assist ex-offenders in their transition to the outside world.

In the United States, the harmful effects of long prison sentences, coupled with severe disadvantages in education, vocational skills, work histories, and stigma, the transition to the free world is more difficult. Organizations such as Project Return and Prison Fellowship are trying to provide support, but there are limits to what they can provide. One reason for the success of CRIS participants stems from the fact that contact between CRIS and future members begins prior to release from prison. CRIS members serve as role models, and serve as an example of how it is possible to live a non-criminal lifestyle. CRIS members provide social support, especially in times of crisis or need. And finally, CRIS serves a networking function, helping ex-offenders access social services in the community.

There are important lessons to be learned from this research. For American policy makers, there is much that they can learn from Finland's efforts to liberalize their criminal justice system. This does not mean a repudiation of prison, but rather a common sense approach to punishment, as well as a reliance on criminological research in policy development. Extremely long and harsh prison sentences in the United States has insured a revolving door of criminal justice, with 67% of ex-offenders returning to prison within three years of their release from prison, most returning within the first 6 months of their release. More effort should be directed to lessening the harmful effects associated with incarceration by reducing the length of prison sentences and by providing more re-integrative services for ex-offenders.

For Finland, this research should serve as a cautionary tale, as evidenced by the quick shift in correctional policy between the 1960s and 1970s, from liberal to conservative, from a philosophy that embraced rehabilitation to one that favored incapacitation. Policy makers in Finland must guard against calls for getting tough on crime, especially after media coverage of extra-ordinary crimes which may raise public concern and which could be easily exploited by politicians running for office.

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